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A SURVIVOR'S TESTIMONY

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PART 1: Before World War II

My name is Gina Greenberg Gotfryd. I was born in the city of Radom, Poland, on January 16, 1932. Before the war I lived with my parents, Cyna and Shamaï (Sam) Greenberg, and a Polish housekeeper. I was an only child. Both my parents were born in a small town, called Ilza, thirty kilometers from Radom. They settled in Radom after their wedding on February 22, 1931. They both had an elementary education, but in their youth they were very active in various Zionist organizations and in a drama club where they performed plays by Jewish authors. They were both fluent in Yiddish as well as in Polish. They were well read and had a progressive outlook on life.

My mother came from an orthodox background, my father from a somewhat less religious family. In their own house, my parents were culturally and traditionally very Jewish, but not religious or kosher. The only times that I remember being exposed to religion was when we went to my maternal grandparents for every Jewish holiday. The whole family would get together—all the children, grandchildren, and many other relatives. Although I was quite young then, I always think of those times with great nostalgia.

Radom was an industrial city, with many tanneries and a large munitions plant. My mother was a housewife. My father was a businessman, partner to an intercity bus company of 22 buses, which for Poland was a big business. The major partner was a Pole, since a Jew could not be licensed by the government. Because of the business, we had a lot of contact with non-Jews, such as the partner, drivers, conductors and mechanics. Our house was always open to them. They respected my mother and loved her cooking. They always made a big fuss over me. They thought I was cute and, "for a Jewish child," my Polish was impeccable.

I never learned Yiddish as a child, since my mother did not want me to develop a Jewish intonation. It was just safer that way. I could pass as a Christian if necessary, and that was a feeling among some Jews before the war. When I went to nursery school and kindergarten, the school was owned by a Jewish woman and Jewish children attended it. Only Polish was spoken.

In February of 1939, I skipped from kindergarten into second grade in a Jewish secular private school. All my friends were Jewish, except when we went to the country for summer vacations, so that I, personally, was never exposed to direct anti-semitism. I was always clean, nicely dressed, and I spoke Polish very well, so that in the Christian-Polish mind I was never the typical Jewish child they imagined one to be.

PART 2: World War II Begins

In June of 1939, I completed the second grade and we went away to the country for the summer. We returned in late August and I was getting ready to begin school in September. But then the war broke out and we fled to my grandparents', thinking that Radom would be more severely bombed because of the munitions plant. Instead, the opposite occurred. Radom was hardly touched, while the town to which we went, Ilza, was exposed to severe battles because it was situated between two hills, with the Germans on one hill and the Poles on the other. When the battle was over and the Germans took over the town, they rounded up all the able-bodied men to clean up the dead and the rubble. It was right then that we realized their cruelty. I still remember the incredible fear that I felt, as did everyone around me.

My parents never thought of leaving Poland, certainly not before the war. During the first few days of the German occupation, my father's partner suggested that we leave with him on one of the buses, to Hungary, before the Germans confiscated them all. He did not ask anyone else, not even his own wife and daughter. My mother refused. She would not leave her parents, her siblings, nieces, nephews, and other relatives. I was only seven years old at the time.

During those first few days of the war, there was no transportation available. Everything was confiscated for the war effort, first by the Poles and then by the Germans. My parents and I walked the thirty kilometers from Ilza back to Radom. For a short time, life seemed almost normal, although my father's business was no more and there were some food shortages. A young German pilot befriended us and would occasionally bring some goodies that we could not get otherwise; I remember mostly chocolate for me.

Within weeks there were round-ups and Jewish men were taken to work. Jews were told to step off the sidewalk and remove their hats when a German approached, and if they didn't they were severely beaten. One day, the Germans set up a military hospital across the street from where we lived. They came into our apartment and confiscated my beautiful white bed, my mother's most cherished piece of furniture.

Little by little, life was beginning to change. I could no longer go to school, since there were no schools for Jewish children. My mother hired a young Jewish high school student as my tutor and I continued with some of my studies at home. But my education did not last for very long. Meanwhile, my father started to work for the Gestapo repairing cars, trucks and buses, although he knew nothing about mechanics. Many times he would come home all beaten up, just the whim of some Gestapo man that day. At least he had a regular job, and did not have to fear the daily round-ups. He now had a permit that indicated he was in the service of the Third Reich.

In the spring of 1940, we had to vacate our apartment, since it was on the main street of the city, called Żeromskiego Street. We moved to the suburbs and shared a small three-room apartment with another couple. The German pilot continued to visit us until two young Polish women threatened to denounce him to the Gestapo for visiting a Jewish home. My parents had to tell him to stop coming.

Within a few months, all Jews had to start wearing arm bands, a blue Star of David on a white background, and in late 1940, early 1941, it was announced that all Jews must move to a restricted area. A ghetto was being formed. We had to move again, and this time, we had to share a little two-room house with three other people. Luckily, the house had a little garden where I could play, where we grew potatoes and some vegetables.

The street was divided right through the middle. One side was for Jews, the other for Aryans. There was no wall between us and I played with some of the Christian children from across the street. From time to time they would say something anti-semitic, but I paid no attention to them. I had high self-esteem and did not take them seriously. It was a working-class neighborhood, they were poor and ignorant, and I felt above it all. Our street was on the outskirts of the ghetto and to me, at nine years old, it felt like being in the country. My father was now working for Mr. Kokocinski, a very nice gentleman whom he knew from before the war. Mr. Kokocinski was a notary public who was poor and used to come to my father's office to use the telephone. Because of some German origins, he was able to have a fruit and vegetable business catering exclusively to Germans stationed in Radom.

Life in the ghetto was becoming more and more difficult. Food was very scarce and people, swollen from hunger, would beg in the streets until they died right there on the sidewalk. I remember walking through the streets of the ghetto with the corpses of children and adults all around me. After a while it became a daily occurrence and one would pay it no attention. A wagon would drive around the ghetto, pulled by human "horses" who would pick up the corpses. No one really claimed them. I don't remember any funerals. This sense of total indifference was prompted by the feeling that, well, they died today, we will die tomorrow. Maybe they were better off—no more hunger, no more fear. We were still very fortunate because occasionally my father would bring home some fruits or vegetables from Mr. Kokocinski's warehouse. That was something most people could only dream about. Although we did not have enough food, we were better nourished than most ghetto inhabitants.

Life went on. My father continued to work, my mother was able to stay home, and for a while, I had a young tutor who came to the house two or three times a week to give me lessons in Polish, Latin, mathematics, and so on. I was able to visit my aunt and uncle and two cousins, who were close to my age and lived a few streets away, as

well as play with some of my pre-war friends. It was even easier to get together because the distances between our houses were so much shorter, now that we lived in a ghetto. The ghetto was very congested. Every house or apartment had a few families living together.

At the time they formed the ghetto, a Jewish police force was organized, as well as a Jewish council. Many young men volunteered, hoping to improve their lot. They did, for a short period of time: as long as the Germans needed their services. For a while, they did have special privileges and more and better food. They did the Germans' dirty work. They performed all the round-ups, searched the work groups at the ghetto gate upon their return from the "outside world," and escorted groups to and from work on the Aryan side. Frequently, some were brutal.

I remember on one occasion, the Jewish policemen were rounding up some people for work. One of them approached my father, who showed his work permit stating that he was employed in a vital service for the Germans. It did not help. My father was kicked and beaten and taken to the police station, where he was promptly dismissed by a superior officer. In fact, that same policeman survived the war, and when my father met him in Radom in 1945 at the home of a mutual friend, they shook hands when they greeted each other. I never forgave my father for it. The policeman lives in New Jersey now and socializes with many of the survivors from Radom.

The round-ups, beatings, starvation, shootings, and executions in the ghetto continued and all became matter of fact, a daily routine. People tried to survive and make the best of things in the best way they knew how, with the constant hope that the war would soon be over and life would be normal again. At about this time, my meager education had to stop. It was August of 1942.

Early one morning, we were awakened by my uncle's terrible sobs. A deportation had taken place in one part of the ghetto and my aunt and her two children had been taken away to the trains. At the time we did not know that all these people went straight to Treblinka to be gassed by exhaust fumes and burned in a pit, dead or still half alive. This was the method used, before they perfected the efficiency of the Final Solution. My uncle was allowed to remain because he had a work permit. We were lucky that on this particular day they did not deport anyone from the outskirts of the ghetto, or else my mother and I would surely have been on that train as well. We tried to comfort my uncle as best we could by repeating the German propaganda, "They are only being resettled and put to work elsewhere." But deep in our hearts, we knew that things were not good. We realized that within days they would come for the rest of us. What were we to do?

There was nowhere to go. The world beyond the ghetto walls was hostile. There was no possibility for any kind of resistance. No one was there to help us. People

still clung to the hope that the Germans needed us for work and we would just be resettled. None of us, in our wildest dreams, could believe what was happening at Treblinka. When rumors started that the deportees were being killed, people would get angry at those who were spreading such false tales. It could not be true. The Germans were a nation of civilized people; the war would be over soon and life would be good again.

In the meantime, my parents were trying to figure out what to do before the next deportation. The best plan seemed to be that my mother go to work in the munitions plant, where she would be safe for the time being. My father was to stay at his job at the fruit and vegetable warehouse. I was to go to my great uncle's tannery, where I would hide with a few other adults and children. And so it was. When the next deportation came, only a few days later, my mother was at the munitions plant, my father was somewhere on the road in Mr. Kokocinski's truck under a load of cabbages, and I was in a hideout in the tannery, where the Polish night watchman locked us up behind a heap of hides.

We stayed there for a few days and nights. We heard constant shooting from the direction of the ghetto and we thought at any moment we would be discovered. Late one afternoon, we did hear some Germans question the watchman whether there were any Jews hidden in the factory. They looked around and finally left. We were safe for the moment. When the shooting subsided, we understood that the deportation was over. Then, the question was, were we the only ones left? If so, what were we to do, where would we go? If we left our hideout, they would kill us.

I was all of ten years old and felt very much alone. The three other children who were there had their mothers; I did not. I didn't know if my parents were alive or dead, or whether I would ever see them again. What was I to do all by myself, where was I to go? I felt that maybe we never should have separated. At least we would have been deported together. As if all this fear and pain were not enough, I began to menstruate for the first time. I did not know what to do or how to take care of myself. I had nothing. I was afraid and embarrassed at the same time, but I had to tell somebody who could help me. Eventually, I told the watchman's wife and she gave me some rags to use, which I rinsed out at night to be used again by day.

Within a few days, we found out that some Jews had been left after the deportation, and with the population diminished now, the new ghetto was restricted to only two streets. Somehow, we made our way back to the ghetto, where ten of us were assigned to one little room. I stayed with my mother's uncle, the pre-war owner of the tannery. Now, there was a German *Komisar* who was in charge of the factory.

Every morning, a Jewish policeman would escort us to the tannery and come to get us in the evening. The men worked all day, the women and children were

supposedly working but really did not, because at that point no one really watched us. The Komisar came by only from time to time to see if all was well and we would just stay out of his way. We could not walk out of the factory unescorted, because that was Aryan territory, but inside we seemed safe. From time to time, some peasants would come by and sell cheese or eggs, which we ate at the factory, because smuggling food into the ghetto was not easy. The Jewish police searched us quite thoroughly, even when the German guard who stood at the ghetto gate seemed totally disinterested.

Within a week or two of our return to the small ghetto, which seemed like an eternity, my father returned and started working with us at the tannery because it became more and more difficult for Mr. Kokocinski to employ Jews. We learned that Mother was okay and wanted in the worst way to join us. She bribed one of the Jewish policemen who took daily trips to and from the munitions plant, and he brought her into the ghetto just for a visit, to see my father and me. It is hard for me to describe this reunion. Not many children were left in the ghetto at this point and there was no force in the world that would keep my mother away from me. She decided not to return to her job at the plant. For weeks after, the policeman who brought her into the ghetto, an old friend of my father's from before the war, would come around and try to blackmail my mother with the threat that unless she give him more money, he would denounce her to the German authorities for defecting. This would have been punishable by death. Finally, my father gave him his watch, the only valuable possession we still had, and told him to go to hell. If he could not understand that a mother wanted to be with her child, then he was no better than the Germans. The man took the watch and left us alone. My mother started to go to the tannery with us and we were together again.

During two or three smaller deportations, Mr. Kokocinski got me out of the ghetto. He actually picked me up from the tannery, took me to his house, and brought me back when it was all over. On one occasion, he took me to his in-laws in another town, hoping to leave me there. They were too frightened to keep me, but I was very happy to rejoin my parents. I always hoped that whatever would happen to my parents would also happen to me. I did not want to survive alone. In the meantime, with the help of Mr. Kokocinski, my parents were able to bring my maternal grandparents from the nearby small town into the Radom ghetto, just before the rest of my father's and mother's families were deported. Now, not only did my parents have to worry about a child, but also about two older people, both not very popular with the German idea of slave labor for the Reich.

The constant round-ups and executions continued, but they were no longer for work details. We never saw these people again. The *Judenrat*, or Jewish Council, had to draw up lists of names, from time to time, for the German authorities. Some people

speculated that it was for a prisoners' exchange and bribed the *Judenrat* or the Jewish police in order to get on the list. Often, they spent their last few *zlotys* or their last piece of jewelry. People were trying to grab at the last straw, because by now we knew that death was the only thing in our future. In each case, these people were taken out on trucks with Ukrainian guards with rifles and shovels. They were executed in a nearby town or in the woods. We would leave for the tannery in the morning and never know whether or not we would find my grandparents at home upon our return.

We lived under extremely congested conditions. My mother and I slept on a kitchen table. People began to react like rats in an overcrowded cage. The fear of the unknown future, the living conditions (if one could call it living) and malnutrition put everyone on edge. People were dying not only from beatings and executions, but also from starvation and disease. In the winter of 1942-43 I developed para-typhoid. I ran an extremely high fever and was delirious for days. The ghetto doctor had nothing to help me with and gave my parents little hope. They were despondent. They had saved me from deportations and now they were going to lose me to illness? My mother took care of me day and night and somehow nursed me back to health. Little by little I regained my strength; my grandmother would cook for me whatever was possible, until I was able to resume my daily trips to the tannery.

One day in the spring of 1943, without any warning, a group of us were taken out of the ghetto to a labor camp not far from Radom, in a small town called Pionki, where they had a gunpowder plant. Fortunately we were taken together, my parents, grandparents and I. In Pionki, no longer a ghetto, men and women were given separate quarters. Ten of us, ten women, were given a room with bunk beds. At least I was with my mother and grandmother. My father and grandfather were in a nearby barrack. We were assigned to a building *komando*. My mother, grandmother and I worked at a cement mixer, shoveling sand, gravel and cement into it. My father and grandfather carried bricks for the masons. Some of the laborers were Poles who got paid for their work and went home at the end of the day. We, naturally, went back to camp.

With each move, with each change (big ghetto to small ghetto, small ghetto to labor camp), our overall situation kept worsening. Living conditions were worse, working conditions were worse, there was less and less food and the fear of death hung over us like a dark cloud. We couldn't even try to buy anything from the Poles who worked near us. We ran out of money and had nothing with which to barter. We were also watched very carefully so that there was little contact or communication with the Polish workers.

In their despair, some people tried to escape from the camp. They were caught and hung. The whole camp population had to watch these public hangings and whoever didn't look up was beaten severely. This was meant to be a lesson to the rest of

us to see what happens to deserters and to take care that the same fate did not await any of us. I was now eleven, very grown up for my age. I had seen dead bodies before, and the hangings did not make that great an impression on me. I knew today was their turn, tomorrow might be my family's. I only hoped that we would go together, that one or two of us would not be taken away and the rest left behind.

Our German supervisor at the building site was a good man. He respected my mother. He told her secretly that he was a Communist and that one day Hitler would get what he deserved. Whenever he could, he would bring part of his lunch and throw it to me when no one was looking. Sometimes, he would give half a sandwich to my mother and tell her, "für die kleine," "for the little one." On some very cold winter days, he would find some excuse to call me into his office so that I could warm myself at the stove. At times he would tell my mother to leave me back in camp, because working outdoors was too cold for me. He would do the same for my grandmother.

Unfortunately, on one of the days my grandmother remained in camp, we came back in the evening only to find an empty bunk. The Germans came that day and took everyone who did not go to work. They were loaded on trucks, taken to the Szkolna camp in Radom, and there, we found out later, were shot in front of an open pit. We were devastated. Grandfather was never the same. Whenever I looked at him, he had this far-away look and there were always tears in his eyes. Even I, his only surviving granddaughter, could not bring him joy any longer. But life went on.

My mother and I had our jobs changed. We now had to unload empty gunpowder crates from trains and stack them five high, in neat rows. We had a Polish supervisor who was a terror, but who, for some reason, liked my mother. He got a kick out of the way I worked, as efficiently as the young women, even though I was only a child. I remember how I had to carry the crate from the railroad car to an open field, and swing the crate up to get it on top of the other crates. I wonder if I could do it now or even thirty years ago. There is no telling what fear will make one do.

Now that my grandmother was gone, it was frequently my job to prepare the meals. This meant cooking a soup, if we had some potatoes, or kneading dough from flour and water to make noodles. I also helped my mother wash and repair whatever clothes we had. And so life continued. The Jewish police kept order in the camp and in exchange for bribes, some families would get their own rooms in which to live. Business as usual.

At the end of June, 1944, the Pionki labor camp was cleared of Jews. We were put into cattle cars, very tightly packed, with little air to breathe and no sanitary conditions. There was a pail at one end of the car which was quickly filled but never emptied. From fear, people developed diarrhea. It was summertime. The heat, congestion, lack of air, the stench all resulted in varied reactions. Some people cried

quietly, some screamed, some moaned, some prayed and some fought each other for an extra inch of space. It was a nightmare. I don't remember how long this trip lasted, but I know it was a few days and nights. After a while, people realized that we were heading south, but no one knew to where. We were not aware of the existence of Auschwitz, but we were soon to find out.

What was important to me and my family was that we were still together, the four of us. The trip was terrible, especially for my grandfather. He wasn't old, probably in his late fifties or early sixties, but in those years of the war that was old. After my grandmother was taken away, he just gave up. He had nothing to live for. People all around us were speculating as to where we were going and what the Germans would do with us. Were they taking us to another labor camp? Some, with more pessimistic views, were hushed or even beaten down for creating unnecessary panic. Eventually, we did arrive and the word spread, *Oświęcim*, Auschwitz.

The doors of the cattle cars were quickly unlocked and we were greeted by the SS, with German shepherds and long-time prisoners in striped uniforms. We were told to get down onto the ramp as fast as possible, with the constant urging of "Raus! Schnell!" and before we knew what was happening, my mother and I were separated from my father and grandfather. We didn't even have a chance to say good-bye. For some strange yet miraculous reason, there was no selection of our transport, at least for the moment. We were practically driven on foot, surrounded by the SS guards and their dogs, to an area which we later found out was called *Kanada*. This was where all the incoming transports left their belongings, which were later sorted by camp inmates and sent to Germany.

We had to strip off all our clothing while watched and attended by male prisoners. When we asked them what kind of camp this was, they gave us no answers. They just did their jobs, and when the SS watched them, they showed even less sensitivity and concern for our fate. We could not understand what kind of people they were. They too were Jews. Why didn't they inform us or help us in some way?

We were soon moved to another large room where other male prisoners shaved our hair—heads, underarms and pubic hair. We were then pushed into a huge shower room. After the showers, where no soap or towels were given, some kind of raggedy dresses were thrown at us. There was no underwear, but some old shoes or clogs. The dresses were of the strangest shapes or forms. Tall women got very short dresses, short women had dresses down to their ankles and even though we knew that we had entered the gates of hell, we looked at each other and laughed. It was a tragic comedy, with our shaven heads and outlandish outfits; it seemed like some strange circus act. We had to call each other by name to make sure who was who, because we were unrecognizable otherwise. We stood outdoors for what seemed hours. We had not

eaten for a very long time, possibly days. Some women tried to swap dresses so that the tall ones would get the longer ones. Finally, they had us march into a camp.

We later learned that we were in Auschwitz-Birkenau and that our camp was "Lager B II," next to "Lager C," which was the Gypsy camp, but as we found out, the Gypsies were long gone. We were assigned to a barrack; I do not remember the number. It was a long stall with a low brick wall running through the center and three-tiered bunks on both sides. At the front entrance was a separate small room with a regular bed, table and chairs, where the *Blokelteste*, the block elder or leader, lived, herself a prisoner. We later found out that she was a rabbi's daughter from some small town in Galicia. Her name was Cesia. She was young, blonde and almost toothless. One of the old timers. She was the most cruel woman I had ever come across up to that point in my life. We all feared her, almost as much as the SS. It was amazing how dehumanized some people had become. Did they think this would help them survive?

My mother and I shared a bare bunk with some other women. There might have been a piece of torn blanket around, I don't remember, but it was summer and we did not mind too much. During the winter it was quite a different story. At roll call that evening Cesia gave us a pep talk about all the terrible things we could expect there. Did we realize where we were? This was Auschwitz. Did we notice those chimneys spewing smoke and flames? Well, if we didn't behave ourselves, that is where we would end up.

During the count, we were "introduced" to our *Lagerelteste*, a young Jewish Czek woman in charge of our camp, and then the SS woman, the camp commander, as well as SS and Ukrainian guards. After their enlightening speeches, we were driven back into the barrack where we were given some *ersatz* coffee and a small ration of straw-like bread. And thus we were initiated into the living hell of Auschwitz.

I remember looking at this young Czek woman, our *Lagerelteste*, and thinking, how come, she is Jewish and I am Jewish, we are both prisoners at Auschwitz, yet she is wearing these beautiful, tall, shiny black leather boots that never seem to be soiled by the clay and mud all around us, and I have to wear these wooden clogs that get stuck in the mud each time I take a step? And why did she look so well fed? I soon learned the difference between us.

Early the next morning we were awakened from a nightmarish sleep and chased outside for roll call. Our *Blokelteste*, Cesia, stood at the exit door with her whip, her constant companion, and whipped whoever wasn't running fast enough. We were to line up in rows of five across in order to be counted. If the count did not agree with their calculations, we would all be punished and have to stand at attention for hours, until it all checked out. Anyone who slumped from exhaustion would be severely beaten by the *Blokelteste*, by the guards, or by both, and no one was permitted to come

to their rescue, or they would meet with an even worse fate.

After a day or so, we were lined up outside in order to be tattooed. Since my mother always pushed me ahead of herself, so that hopefully she could follow wherever I went, our tattoo numbers were in consecutive order. My number is A-14662, my mother's was A-14663. We had become nameless, just a number. If someone was missing at roll call, it was not a person any longer, but such and such number. We were now full-fledged inmates of Auschwitz.

Our group was not really a work *komando*. Only from time to time they would have us carry rocks or bricks somewhere inside our camp so that we never left the camp grounds. Each morning would start with the roll call and then some *ersatz* coffee with a small ration of saw dust bread for the day. Then, we had to do some chores in our barrack. We had to carry away the pails filled with urine and feces, collected during the night, to the latrine at the other end of the camp; we were not allowed to leave the barrack after the evening roll call. There were other chores, depending upon the whim of the *Blokelteste*. Sometimes, during the day, we were allowed to go to the washroom and latrine. We might try to wash up a bit or to use the toilets, a long row of holes cut into wood. The smell was awful because there was no plumbing, and there was the danger of catching some disease like dysentery or typhus. From time to time they would take us for showers and *entlausung*. They would disinfect our clothes, but we would never get the same things back.

By midday we would get a small helping of what they called soup. It was mostly some dark brown water that tasted horrible, but at least it was something to put in our stomachs. If you were lucky and at the end of the line, you might have gotten your soup from the bottom of the barrel and something might have been floating in it. Some women tried to get to the end of the line. If they were noticed doing it, they were beaten and no soup was given to them at all. Some women tried to scrape the empty barrel. Fights would break out among them and it always ended up in more punishment and more beatings. My mother and I didn't know how to push ourselves to get any extra food and we had to live on the prescribed rations.

Some afternoons, when we did not have to work, we would try to see some of the new arrivals, because new transports were coming in almost daily. Depending upon where they came from, people would inquire about friends and relatives, or maybe some news from the outside world. Occasionally, the new arrivals were Jews who lived as Christians and were either caught or denounced and brought to Auschwitz. But they too knew very little. The new transports were coming not only from other ghettos and labor camps all over Poland, but from all over Europe—France, Holland, Belgium, but mostly from Greece, Italy and Hungary. I remember how the Greek and Italian Jews were dropping like flies. It was now late fall. Mornings, evenings and nights were very

cold and the Greeks and Italians could not cope with the Polish climate. We had lived under the German yoke for five years by then and had become hardened. They could not communicate with others: they didn't understand German and unlike many of the other Jews they didn't speak Yiddish. They gave up hope, the most important ingredient to survival, as soon as they came. For them it was a sudden change, as if they had come from heaven to hell.

Every morning, corpses would be piled up in front of the barracks to be taken away by a special *komando*. My mother would look at my shriveled up body, the pussy sores all over my legs from malnutrition, and I knew what she was thinking or feeling. Today, being a mother myself, I understand it even better. At times like these, we would look around the camp, at the watch towers with the Ukrainian guards and machine guns at the ready, at the electrified barbed wire fences, the chimneys, frequently darkening the sky with their smoke, or lighting it up with their flames, but always giving off the stench of burning flesh that our nostrils could never get used to, and our hearts would sink. At moments like these I would embrace my mother, point at the chimneys and tell her that we would never end up there. I knew we wouldn't, I would tell her again and again, and she would smile her sad smile and try to agree with me.

At some point we found out that my mother's cousin, someone she grew up with and was very close to, had been in Auschwitz for more than a year. Through some work group, we were able to let her know that we were in Camp B. We learned that she worked in *Kanada* and that for Auschwitz standards, she was very well off. She worked at sorting possessions from all the incoming transports, which provided her the opportunity to have better clothes and more and better food. After a few weeks, she came to see us, and brought us a little jar of jam, which to us was worth more than gold or diamonds. She never showed her face again. After the war we learned from a friend of hers, who was in Auschwitz as a Christian and had her own room and was able to cook her own food, that when she wanted to send some soup for me, my mother's cousin told her, "If my daughter could die, it's okay for her to drop dead. I don't care." She came to see us that one time just to find out what happened to her daughter after her arrest. Beyond that she was not interested in helping us. My mother held on to that jam for a special occasion. It came sooner than we expected.

It was an early afternoon in November. We were chased out of our barrack under Cesia's whip and told to line up. Soon after we were told to strip and stand in the nude. The dreaded word *selection* spread throughout the ranks. There were SS guards and dogs, all the camp dignitaries, and among them a very handsome SS man wearing white gloves. We were told to pass in front of him, single file, while he pointed with his gloved thumb to the right or to the left. As we got closer to him, my mother pushed me in front of her as she always did, and reminded me that if he asked any questions I was

to say that I was sixteen years old and that she was my sister. We were getting closer and closer. My heart was pounding. Was this to be my last day on earth? Would the prophesy I constantly repeated to my mother never come true? Why should my mother die for me? I knew that she would follow wherever I went. Finally, I stood right in front of him, the Angel of Death, Dr. Mengele, as we later found out. He looked at me for what seemed an eternity. He touched my breast with his gloved hand and asked me how old I was. He actually talked to me, a rare treat for a Jew. When I told him that I was sixteen, when in reality I was only twelve, he looked at me again and said, "You are a little too young, but go," and motioned with his thumb to the right, to the able-bodied, the living. Fortunately my mother was motioned to the right as well. When the selection was over and we, the lucky ones, were still lined up, my mother opened the jar of jam and gave everyone around us a little taste of it. I remember the sun going down behind the horizon as the women were blessing my mother and wishing her that she live and be able to serve her guests at my wedding feast. I don't think I will ever forget that day, although many other experiences have faded from my memory, and my mother is not around anymore to remind me.

My mother and I tried to go on with our lives. We had no one to help us, no extra rations, no better or warmer clothing or shoes. There were women around us with daughters my age, who had husbands in adjoining camps, who would come into our camp with their work *komandos* and sneak in some food for them. Other women were seamstresses who would sew for the *Blokelteste* and get extra food. We had nothing. Some friends would sleep on the same bunk, but they would turn away from me when they ate. Not to make them feel uncomfortable or guilty I would pretend that I was asleep. My mother and I didn't know how to organize more food, how to literally step over dead bodies to get extra things. We both had thin, raggedy dresses, no underwear and no shoes to speak of when the Polish winter arrived. And my poor mother had to watch me shiver and starve.

It was now the end of November or the beginning of December. I became deathly ill. I developed measles, I ran a very high fever and was delirious for many days. My mother was afraid to take me to the infirmary, because they took the sick to the gas chambers every few days. Instead, she went to plead for help from a Hungarian Jewish doctor who worked at the infirmary. She was very kind, but there was nothing she could do for me. Every morning and every evening my mother would have to drag me out for roll call and hold me up so that no one would notice how sick I was. By day, when everyone had to leave the barrack, she would leave me on the bunk, covered with all kinds of rags so that no one would notice I was there, and hope that when she returned she would find me where she had left me. In order to disguise the red rash on my face she would scrape the red paint from the painted cross on the back of my dress,

mix it with her saliva and paint my cheeks with it. I stopped eating, but my mother, unlike some mothers, saved all my rations no matter how hungry she was, with the hope that when I got better I would have some bread to eat.

One night she had a dream about my grandfather. We already knew that back in September, during *Rosh-Hashona*, there had been a selection and they took him to be gassed. The Nazis loved to kill us, especially on Jewish holidays. In my mother's dream, grandfather came to her with tears running down his cheeks. He said, "I stood before God and I demanded that he save this one grandchild of mine." That morning, I woke up and for the first time in days I told my mother that I was hungry and wanted a piece of bread. My mother was not a backward, superstitious woman, but until her dying day she believed in that dream, she believed that her father had something to do with my recovery. Now that my appetite had returned, I had the extra rations of bread that my mother saved and little by little I was able to walk on my own feet.

Our misery continued. December passed and January came. It was now 1945. Five and a half years of horror. More and more people were dying from starvation, frost, disease and sadistic mistreatment. Many of the camp inmates were sent on transports to Germany to work. No one resisted and many of the women welcomed the transports. It was one way, and the only way, to escape this hell. Nothing could be worse than Auschwitz.

On January 16th I turned thirteen. We started to hear far away thunder-like sounds, but in camp nothing changed. The SS seemed a little on edge, which resulted in more beatings and cruelty for us. A few days later, towards evening, the whole camp was told to line up. No one knew what was happening, but rumors spread that we were being evacuated. We realized that the Russians must be getting closer and we were to be marched westward, towards Germany. We lined up five abreast and the columns began to move towards the camp gate. My mother and I were in the same row, and as we approached the gate, an air-raid siren sounded. The row just ahead of us went through the gate and we were stopped. The gate was closed and we were told to go back to our barracks. I remember how terrified and how unhappy we felt. Those who left certainly had a better chance of surviving. They were going to work, while we were going to die. We were sure of this: The Germans were not going to leave us behind and let us live. We were convinced that either that night or the next day would be our end. We went back to our barracks and hid under the bunks, as if this would give us some protection. All night we listened and watched, and waited for them to come and get us.

No one came. Not that night, not the next day, or for the next few days. The thunder-like sounds seemed to be getting closer. We had no food or water for days. We were freezing. What were we to do? Finally, out of hunger and thirst, someone dared stick their head out of the barrack. Not a soul was in sight. The camp was covered with

a deep blanket of snow. A few courageous women went out and came back a while later with some raw, frozen potatoes, which they had found in the camp kitchen. They reported that there was no trace of Germans or Ukrainians. The kitchen must have been raided by others before them and there was nothing left. We lived like that for a few days with no guards around us, afraid to move for fear the Germans might return. People too sick to go on continued to die. Their corpses remained wherever they dropped and the constantly falling snow just covered them like a down comforter.

In the late afternoon of January 27th, we noticed some uniformed silhouettes in the distance with rifles poised. We panicked. Were the Germans coming back to get us? Now, when the war seemed almost over and our survival a possibility? As the figures got closer and closer, we recognized them as Russian soldiers.

To describe the next scene is almost impossible. Whoever could still run, walk, or crawl on all fours came out of the barracks. Women fell down at the feet of the soldiers, kissed their boots and cried. The Russians were visibly moved and wanted to help us, but they themselves had hardly anything to share. They had been through some rough battles with little food or rest. But we didn't care. We were just so happy to see them, so grateful for liberating us, so thankful for saving our lives. We hardly slept that night. My mother was worried that the Germans might still return and push back the Russians. And so, she decided that we would leave Auschwitz the next morning.

Many of the people remained, too sick or too weak to move, and were later filmed by the Russians. We tried to walk toward Krakow, some thirty kilometers from the camp. We were not very healthy or very strong, but my mother wanted us to be on the other side of the barbed wire, come what may.

PART 3: After Liberation

We started walking. The snow was knee deep and it was very cold. We still did not have adequate clothing, but we were driven by the idea that even if we made one or two kilometers a day, we would be that much further away from Auschwitz. Along the way, Russian tanks, trucks and jeeps were passing us with men and women soldiers. We were fascinated by the women in uniform sitting atop tanks. They waved and greeted us warmly, and kept moving westward at a steady pace. To us, they were our heroes.

Occasionally, a Polish peasant would give us a ride on his horse-drawn wagon, which gave us a little rest and got us closer to Krakow, our destination. We slept in barns or in peasants' huts, whenever they would take us in. Some of them would share some food with us, when they realized where we were coming from. It took us a good week to travel the thirty kilometers, but we finally did arrive at the city of Krakow. I

failed to mention earlier that along our walk we came across many dead bodies of the people who were chased out of camp on the night of the air-raid, and we remembered how we envied them.

Upon our arrival in the city, we found that there were shelters set up for refugees returning from camps. This is where we settled for the time being. One day, while standing in a soup line, a couple stopped to talk to my mother. They could not believe that she returned from Auschwitz with a child. They invited us to their house; they were a Jewish couple who had survived as Christians. They introduced us to their friend who was also a Jew and survived by living as a forest ranger. It turned out that the man knew my mother from before the war. He had an apartment and took us in. It felt strange to live in a normal apartment with furniture, kitchen, a bathroom. We stayed with him until we left Krakow.

Eventually, after many trials and tribulations caused by the war still raging further west, and the lack of transportation, my mother and I returned to Radom. We had no place to stay, so we went to the watchman of the tannery and asked his wife for shelter. After a few days, she told us we had better leave because her son was involved in the "AK," the Home Army, a far right partisan group that was killing Jews. She said she was afraid for our lives. By then we had discovered that a few Jews had returned to Radom and an agency was set up to aid the returnees. With some help, we were able to share an apartment with a Jewish couple from my mother's home town, who had posed as Aryans to survive. Every night we would have to push a heavy wardrobe against the front door for fear that the AK partisans would come to kill us. They did kill two Jews in Radom just before our return and some months later they killed forty-four Jews in the nearby city of Kielce. It was a real pogrom.

In the meantime, we kept asking whoever returned whether they knew anything about my father. Everyone was telling us that he was dead, that they actually saw him die. My mother didn't know what to do or where to go. Most urgent in her mind was that I resume my education. So one day, we went to the local public school to enroll me in whatever grade they thought would be appropriate. As soon as we entered the building the children started yelling, "Dirty Jewess, get out of here!" I told my mother that under no circumstances would I go to school there. Not after what we had been through. Fortunately, the governor was someone my mother knew, a man who during the war was a partisan in the leftist "AL," or People's Army. He came from a village near my mother's home town. When he heard what happened, he arranged a stipend for me and a young couple began to tutor me.

By August or September of 1945, we unexpectedly received a letter from my father from Germany. We couldn't believe it was possible that we survived as a whole nuclear family. One in a million. Within a few days my father was back in Radom. This

is when we found out how he learned of our existence: When he was liberated by the Americans in May of 1945, he didn't even bother to look for us. He knew that in Auschwitz a woman with a child went straight to the gas chambers. Knowing my mother, he was sure that she would not have given me up to save herself. So he stayed in Germany with the hope that some time soon he would be able to join his older brother, who had emigrated many years earlier, in New York. One day, someone recognized a *kapo*, a camp collaborator, and some people were beating him up. A crowd gathered, and in the crowd were my father and a man from Radom. When he recognized my father, he asked him what he was doing there. Why wasn't he in Radom with his wife and daughter? My father became very upset that this man dared to joke about something as serious as that, and told him so. The man swore that he had just come back from Radom where he had seen and even spoken to us. This is how we were reunited.

Some months after my father's return, there was a pogrom in the nearby city of Kielce, which I mentioned earlier in my testimony. My father's relatives, who lived in Warsaw and were part of the new government, insisted that we stay with them. They lived in a building guarded by the army, where we would be safe. These relatives survived the war in Russia, as did my aunt, uncle and their baby. We spent the summer of 1946 in Warsaw with the idea of leaving Poland as soon as possible. We realized that there were no prospects of finding any other surviving relatives.

With the help of my father's cousin Jakob Berman, a minister in the Polish government, we were able to go to Paris with the hope that from there, we could go to America. There were six of us now: my aunt, uncle, baby cousin, my parents and I, the total survivors of two very large families on both my father's and mother's sides. In France, the quota for Polish Jews was filled for many years to come, and we were advised to go to Germany and settle in a DP (Displaced Persons) camp, which would make the process of emigration faster. We spent three months in Paris, where I started to study some French. I also spent two weeks in a Rothschild camp for Jewish children who had survived the war, a most memorable experience for me. I must have been the only child, and there were children from all over Europe, who had parents.

We eventually made our way to Stuttgart, Germany, on an American military train, with the help of some friends from Radom. We later learned that the key person who had the contact with the Americans was Bernard Gotfryd, the man I would marry some years later.

We lived in the DP camp in Stuttgart for three years. I attended a Hebrew high school called Beit-Bialik, for the DP children, where everything was taught in Hebrew. My mother worked in the school kitchen and my father worked in the warehouse where food rations were distributed to the people in the camp, compliments

of UNRAA and some Jewish-American organizations. It was not a camp in the sense of German camps. The DPs occupied two streets. Each family, or group of friends who became a family, lived in one room of each apartment and shared the kitchen. Everything seemed very temporary, because everyone was waiting to leave Europe for America, for Palestine, for South America. I found two or three of my childhood friends, since Stuttgart was the city where Radomer survivors congregated. My friends and I joined the Hashomer Hatzair Scouts and spent summers in camps run by them. In school and at camp, I learned about Judaism, Zionism, and for the first time in my life took pride in my people.

Emigration to America turned out to be very difficult, although my rich uncle guaranteed that we would not be a burden to anyone. In the meantime, my aunt and uncle had an opportunity to go to Canada while we continued to wait. Finally, after many interviews and medical check-ups, our dream came true. In February of 1949 we reached the shores of New York City, on a small military transport ship, and proceeded to build our new life.

PART 4: A New Beginning

Upon my arrival in New York, my education was the number one concern. I began to attend the Robert Louis Stevenson High School on the upper west side of Manhattan. It was a private school for which my American uncle promised to pay, but never did. Since I hardly knew any English, the idea was that in a small private school I would be able to progress more quickly. I was seventeen years old and had many gaps in my education. The director of the school was kind enough to accept a very small part of the tuition, knowing our situation. English was a problem for me. I was terribly discouraged after starting school in so many different languages and countries. I also lost about six years of schooling, as well. Nevertheless, I started high school in March of 1949, went through summer school, cried every night at my homework, and graduated in January of 1950. After passing an entrance exam, I was accepted to Queens College and began my studies in February of 1950. I was getting more and more familiar with English, made wonderful friends, and at the end of my freshman year made the Dean's list. I was my parents' pride and joy. Even my American uncle would show me off in his office.

Since my father was a businessman before the war and had no special skills, it was hard for him to find work. After many appeals to the conscience of his American brother and the intervention of his more kind-hearted partner, my father started working in his brother's lithography plant. The plant employed 350 people, so it should not have been that difficult to find a little niche for my father. He was finally given a

job in the basement. It paid very little and he had to wear rubber boots because the water was up to his ankles. This is how he worked for almost thirty years. As the boss's brother he was given harder, not easier work. But somehow we managed. We swallowed our pride and went on.

In my upper junior year in college, in March of 1952, I was married to Bernard Gotfryd, who is a survivor and who came from Radom as well. We had a nice little apartment in Astoria, Queens. I continued my studies and Bernard worked as a photographer. In June of 1953, I graduated from Queens College after three and a half years, with a degree in chemistry/foods. I started working in research for General Foods, but not for long, because on March 2, 1954, our son Howard Jeffrey was born. On June 17, 1955, our daughter Eva Sharon was born. I stayed home and took care of our children and Bernard started to work on the staff of *Newsweek* magazine as a photojournalist, where he remained for over thirty years. We now were a little family of three generations, unusual for most survivors. My parents adored their grandchildren and were very close to them. Our children, Howard and Eva, were part of a very tiny minority among the second generation who had grandparents.

In 1964 I went back to school part-time. By 1969 I received a Masters Degree from Hofstra University and began to teach elementary school in the New York City public school system. I taught in deprived areas of Queens for almost twenty-two years and retired in June of 1990.

Our children grew and developed. Our son attended Queens College and earned a Bachelors Degree in English literature. He worked part-time as a copy clerk for *Newsweek* while a student, and then full time as a page technician for a total of thirteen years. He also spent two years working as a photo studio assistant and free-lance photographer. He is currently a production editor at *Sports Illustrated For Kids* in New York. In 1987 our son was married to Rose Unes, the daughter of Lebanese-American farmers from Minnesota, and on March 17, 1989, we were blessed with a little grandson, Elias Simon Gotfryd. Although our son and daughter-in-law are divorced now, Elias is the little sunshine in all our lives.

Our daughter, Eva, decided to work after high school and got a job with U.S. Customs at John F. Kennedy Airport. But disaster struck again, as if the Holocaust were not enough. In August of 1977, Eva went to Mexico with a girlfriend for one week's vacation. She knew all about having to be careful with the water and certain foods there, which she was. Nevertheless, because she had a mild case of a condition called dysautonomia, she became very sick and then died there. She was never hospitalized, and no one informed us of her illness, not her girlfriend and not even the person who was conducting the trip. All she needed was intravenous feeding to prevent dehydration from her fever. It was not to be. It is impossible to describe our grief. She

was only 22 years old, at the very beginning of her life.

Two and a half years later, after a very painful bout with uterine cancer, my mother, Cyna Greenberg, died. I still believe that primarily, she died of a broken heart. She just gave up living after the loss of her beloved granddaughter, with whom she was very close. The rest of us—my father, husband, son and I “picked up the pieces,” as they say, and went on, although the pain is as fresh as it was seventeen years ago. The only joy that brightens our lives and my father’s, at the age of 90, is our Elias.

My husband, Bernard Gotfryd, retired from *Newsweek* magazine in 1988, after more than thirty years. In 1990, his book of short stories, *Anton the Dove Fancier and Other Tales of the Holocaust*, a memoir, was published. It won the Christopher award for literature and a citation from the PEN society in 1991, as well as much praise in the press and from individuals all over the United States and Canada. It was produced as a one-man play in Denmark, based on eight of the twenty-one stories. Bernard is also working on a photography book about his thirty years as a photojournalist.

I try to spend some time with my elderly father, our son and grandson and friends, and to read as much as I can, since my eyesight is failing, the result of having *retinitis pigmentosa*. It may eventually cease altogether. But life continues and we try to make the best of it.

I believe that my wartime experiences, as traumatic as they were, had a considerable influence on the adult me, as a human being. I am able to feel the pain of those who suffer. I care for people. I have also learned to keep my head high and never to be ashamed of my Jewishness, as I was during my childhood in Poland, but rather, be proud of it. I may not be religious, but with my heart and soul, traditionally and culturally, I am very much a Jew.

As far as talking about my experiences is concerned, I was always able to talk about them, to whomever was willing to listen: my college friends, acquaintances, my children, or anyone who asked and was interested in learning.

One may ask if another Holocaust is possible. I suppose it is possible, since people never seem to learn from history. There are Neo-Nazi elements everywhere, and anti-semitism is spreading all over the world like wildfire. But I have always been an optimist, and I think that this is partly why I survived. I always had hope in my heart. I believe in the Constitution of the United States, and I hope that another Holocaust will never happen again. War is a horror. I still dream about hunger, deportations, Germans chasing me, being separated from my family and not being able to find them. I wake up in a state of panic and I say to myself, “Never again.”

I am told by my son that I am overprotective. I always attributed this to my being a “Jewish mother,” but he claims it is because I am a survivor. I am not sure which is the real reason. But whichever it is, I hope that Jewish mothers of the future

will never, ever need to be called survivors and to be overprotective of their children because of their past.

I am glad that I was finally able to write about my life experiences beginning before World War II, during it, and up to the present. Basically, I am glad for three reasons: for my son and grandson, for posterity, but also for myself. I realize now that I had a need to get it all out of my system, not in little bits of conversations here and there, but all at once in a long, painful narrative, a form of catharsis.

PART 5: A Visit to the Land of My Birth

It has been fifty-two years since I left my native city of Radom, Poland. I left soon after the Kielce pogrom in 1946, when my parents, Sam and Cyna Greenberg, decided that Poland was no place for Holocaust survivors, nor did it promise any future for me. I was fourteen years old, still recovering from my experiences in Auschwitz.

For many years as I pursued my education, raised a family and taught school, the thought of Poland or the Polish language evoked only pain. I never wanted to return to a land where my people had suffered antisemitism and death, during and after the war.

However, as the years passed, I was surprised by the urge to return, not alone, but with my son Howard, and my grandson, Elias. I wanted to show them their family origins while I was still alive and able to experience such a journey with them. So it came to be that by August of 1998, the decision had been made, arrangements were confirmed, and we left New York bound for Warsaw.

I so much wanted to take my children to Radom, and to the apartment where I was born, in which I lived until the ghetto was formed. I had feelings of great anxiety. I was told that when Jews return simply to visit their old homes, they are met with threats of police. As it turned out, I was most fortunate. We arrived at my old apartment with two bouquets of wildflowers (purchased from some old women on the sidewalk in front of City Hall) for the woman who currently lives there. She could not have been lovelier. She too, she told us, had been born in this apartment, so she and I had something in common.

My son took a photograph of the two of us, which I mailed to her. She offered us tea, but I declined because I was in a hurry to get back to City Hall before it closed.

One of my assignments while in Radom was to search for a photograph of my late mother-in-law, Sarah Gotfryd, which might possibly be found attached to some old document. When the clerks at the City Hall, and subsequently the State Office, understood that I was not there to claim any property, but sought only a photograph, they became extremely helpful and kind. Unfortunately, no photograph was found. My

husband Bernard has been searching for his mother's picture for over fifty years.

During our walk through the Kosciuszko Park and the adjacent streets of Radom, we met three Israelis who were on a similar geneological journey. They were descendants of one of the branches of the Rakocz family. It was a happy encounter, and seemed not unlike meeting one's own kinfolk on a desert island.

Later in the course of our trip, we visited Krakow and Kazimierz, the old Jewish quarter there, given to the Jewish population of the city centuries ago by King Kazimierz. It was an extremely moving experience to walk through the streets where Jewish children once ran and played, most of these streets empty and dilapidated now. Three synagogues still stand in Kazimierz. One is used as a museum, and only a handful of old Jews attend services there. Another has a small cemetery beside it, crowded with crumbling tombstones whose weather-beaten engravings are almost illegible.

At this latter synagogue was a caretaker, a survivor of Schindler's now-famous list and a sad, pathetic figure. At seventy-four, he looked more like he might have been ninety—doughy, stooped and toothless. He was married to a Polish woman and had four Catholic children with her.

The one uplifting experience we had in Kazimierz was a visit to the Jewish Cultural Institute, located in a beautifully renovated building, captained by a Christian Pole. Young volunteers from Germany work there as a way of helping out in Jewish institutions internationally.

Another very vivid and emotional experience was our visit to the Wieliczka salt mine near Krakow. My husband worked there in the summer of 1944, before he was shipped to Mathausen, Austria. As we walked through the various chambers five hundred feet underground, we saw magnificent sculptures of famous people made of salt and beautiful salt-crystal chandeliers. Our guide pointed out the chamber where Jewish prisoners poured cement floors, toward the end of the war, for the Heinkel airplane factory, which was ultimately abandoned before production ever began. After the war ended, Polish miners carved a Star of David over the door to this chamber in memory of the Jewish prisoners who labored there. It was very moving, and I watched my nine-year-old grandson, who seemed to be taking it all in.

My trip also took me to Bialystok, where I went to visit the Polish woman who took care of my aging father in New York City before he died. I met her son, a young lawyer, and his wife, a judge. They were most hospitable, warm, kind and very open-minded. Their feelings regarding the church surprised me. They were critical of the Church's current involvement in politics, and of all the conservative rules imposed by the Church on its constituency. They claimed that most young people in Poland are currently disturbed by these occurrences and seldom attend Church services.

The day I was in Bialystok, August 16th, was the anniversary of the Bialystok

ghetto uprising. My cousin's husband, who is the director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, was scheduled to speak at the commemoration ceremony that day. It was a good opportunity for me to join him and my cousin.

The only Jew who lives in Bialystok, a city which had a very large Jewish population before the war, organized this event. The monument dedicated to the uprising, where the ceremony took place, stands where a Jewish cemetery used to be before a bulldozer leveled it in 1970.

We were horrified when we realized we were walking over Jewish remains. The band was playing lively Israeli songs, totally inappropriate for such a solemn occasion. A few curious onlookers stood around. It was a sad day.

I tried not to cry in the presence of my son and grandson. For their sakes I did not want to make this too somber a trip. But one day when my cousins took me to their summer cottage outside Warsaw and we stopped in a little town or "shtetl" called Dobre where mostly Jews used to live, the floodgate of tears just burst open. Perhaps it was an accumulation of all the held-back emotions, but the sight of all those small shops where Jews used to sell their wares and reside in back was too much to bear. I was told that Henryk Grynberg, the writer, came from a nearby village. Now, there is not a single Jew left. We are quite aware of the aftermath of the Holocaust, yet when the reality of this aftermath hits us square in the face, the pain is unbearable.

During my stay in Poland, I had numerous conversations with our good friend, a young Polish journalist. I met all kinds of people, some of them young, some of them older. The young people were open-minded, intelligent, interested in the lost Jewish culture and critical of the older generation and those who would place crosses in Auschwitz.

I know that this trip would not have been the same had it not been for the hospitality of my cousins and good friends. I am glad that my son and grandson had the opportunity to meet some of these people, to walk through the city of my childhood and sit in the very room in which I was born.

In spite of Adolf Hitler, not only did I survive, but I brought with me the next two generations. I believe it is important that my children know their roots, so they will be able to pass this knowledge on to their children. Our trip was a memorable and symbolic event, one that my son, my grandson and I will never forget.

